

## Demotisation or destandardisation in Flanders? Linguistic ethnography can shed (some) light

Flemish linguists and opinion makers haven't always been welcoming the evolution, but it is clear now that "a standard variety of Belgian Dutch [...] is in any case losing ground to the variety of colloquial Belgian Dutch [...] referred to as *Tussentaal*" (literally *in-between-language*) (Grondelaers & van Hout, 2011). Ever since *tussentaal* came into the picture, linguists have been debating about whether this phenomenon will cause the current standard language ideology (SLI) in Flanders to evolve towards demotisation or destandardisation (Plevoets, 2008; Grondelaers & van Hout, 2011; Van Hoof & Jaspers, 2012). Since traditional sociolinguistic – mainly quantitative – descriptions of the complex situation do not seem to brighten up the discussion, it is recommendable to test other – more qualitative – approaches. As SLI's originate on a micro level in the heads of individual language users, linguistic ethnography seems to be the suited method to analyse SLI's in change.

Linguistic ethnography encourages us to dive into day-to-day practice where the (re)construction and negotiation of meaning happens (Eckert, 1997). From this day-to-day meaning (re)construction and negotiation on, changes in the SLI of a speech community can develop. The current research therefore intends to analyse language use and perceptions of pupils in a secondary school in Flanders using sociolinguistic-ethnographic methods. The study focusses on an educational setting since there, the functional elaboration of *tussentaal* stands in sharp contrast with the Flemish education ministry's renewed demands that all pupils speak Standard Dutch. Already, the research shows that the Flemish SLI is changing. Namely, at first sight, most of this pupils seem to abandon any kind of SLI. If this finding proves to be accurate and widely spread across Flanders, it would mean that the Flemish region is heading towards a situation of destandardisation. However, deeper analysis of the data and follow-up research is needed, since it is possible that the rejection of any kind of SLI is just a an expression of typical youth rebelliousness which will disappear as the pupils grow older.

Eckert, P. (1997). Why Ethnography? In U.-B. Kotsinas, A.-B. Stenstrom & A.-M. Karlsson (Eds.), *Ungdomsspråk i Norden* (pp.52-62). Stockholm: Stockholm University.

Grondelaers, S. & van Hout, R. (2011). The Standard Language Situation in the Low Countries: Top-Down and Bottom-Up Variations on a Diaglossic Theme. *Journal of Germanic Linguistics*, 23(3), 199-243.

Plevoets, K. (2008). *Tussen spreek-en standaardtaal. Een corpusgebaseerd onderzoek naar de situationele, regionale en sociale verspreiding van enkele morfosyntactische verschijnselen uit het gesproken Belgisch-Nederlands*. Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

Van Hoof, S. & J. Jaspers (2012): Hyperstandaardisering. *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde (TNTL)* 128 (2), 97-125.